

DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS

REVELATION 6:9–11: AN EXEGESIS OF THE FIFTH SEAL IN THE LIGHT OF THE PROBLEM OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DELAY

Name of researcher: Patrice Allet
Name of adviser: Ranko Stefanovic, PhD
Date completed: January 2015

The fifth seal of Revelation has most often been treated from an anthropological perspective that appears to be clearly inadequate to account for the depth of this trigger passage located in a climactic setting. In and around the fifth seal, the text indeed suggests that the persecution of the last days has occurred. Imminence and delay do seem to intersect in the passage, creating a crisis of eschatological proportions which, in turn, raises questions of theodicy. The purpose of this dissertation is to increase the understanding of the fifth seal as a whole through a focused study of its delay motif in light of similar relevant occurrences in the Hebrew Bible.

The “delay” approach is justified by the important presence of the “How long?” motif in the question section of the fifth seal and the call to “wait/rest for a little while” in the answer part. The occurrence of the word *χρονὸς* (the duration aspect of time) also points to an extension of time in connection with the crisis pointed out in the text. Further, delays and apocalypses are closely related where persecution and martyrdom often raise the question of eschatology and, by the same token, that of theodicy.

After the introduction, chapter 2 of this dissertation surveys the dominant views on the fifth seal from the second century to the present. Chapter 3 deals with the exegetical analysis of Rev 6:9 in order to come to terms with the stage setting of the delay question. Chapter 4 surveys the usage of the “how long” motif in the Old Testament and the Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic tradition and probes the imminence/delay tension from the interaction of the fifth seal with preceding context. Chapter 5 completes the exegetical and theological analyses of the resolution section of the fifth seal (6:11) and addresses issues of fulfillment in the text and the succeeding context to derive the theological meaning for the interval. The last chapter synthesizes the findings of the entire study.

Regarding the timing of the eschatological fullness, everything, even the delay, stays within God’s control and he is not subjected to the human time perception. He controls human history according to his benevolent purposes and establishes the time of the end. God’s answer does suggest that the End coincides with (1) the totality of the eschatological people of God as determined by the wisdom of God’s purposes, (2) the fullness of God’s missionary program through radical sacrificial witness, (3) the fullness of the measure of iniquity, (4) the general resurrection of dead witnesses, and (5) the transformation of the cosmos.

By delaying the final judgment, the theodicy in the fifth seal appears to be founded on the mercy of God in favor of the inhabitants of the world. Therefore, in God's program, the theological meaning of the interval is that time is allowed to save the inhabitants of the earth and the fifth seal is an invitation not to let death stand in the way of radical witnesses in order to accomplish that purpose.